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## THE PROPHETIC TEACHING CONCERNING SIN

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In the Old Testament, taken as a whole, there are two general tendencies or types of thought concerning sin. One of these is the legal or ceremonial conception; sin is the infraction of statutes, or the neglect or contempt of the prescribed ritual. The other idea is ethical; sin is an affront to God's holy will and a violation of human rights. Of course, these two modes of viewing the subject are only relatively, not absolutely, different. Where the statutes in question enjoin ethical duties or enforce the inherent rights of humanity, there the violation of them coincides with the ethical idea of sin. This would be the case, for example, in the breaking of such commandments as, "Thou shalt not kill," "Thou shalt not bear false witness."

These two conceptions of sin correspond, in general, to the two great facts of Israel's history—legalism and prophetism. The tendencies of thought characteristic of these two forms of religion run through the course of the nation's development. They interpenetrate, even while they rival each other. The statutory and the historical books of the Old Testament exhibit a combination of the two tendencies—the ceremonial or priestly, and the prophetic or ethical. In the preaching of the prophets, while moral obligations and moral righteousness are almost exclusively emphasized, the recognition of ceremonial is not wholly wanting. In general, however, the nomistic conception of righteousness and of sin prevails in the legal and historical books; the more purely ethical conception, in the prophets.

The generic idea of sin in the Old Testament is that of an offense against a superior power. This higher power may be a man, especially the king, as in 1 Kings 1:21 and 2 Kings 18:14. But commonly "sin" represents a distinctively religious conception; it is against God, his will, command, or requirements. As examples of the pro-

phetic note in Israel's lawbooks, we may cite the Ten Commandments, only one of which—that enjoining the observance of the Sabbath—has to do with the established cultus; and this requirement is grounded on considerations of humanity (Exod. 23:12). In the prophetic narrative of the first sacrifice, in Gen., chap. 4, stress is laid upon the spirit in which the offering is made as the matter of chief importance (Gen. 4:7), and Abraham is accepted, not because of his gift, but because of his trust in God (Gen. 15:6). In a later source we read a concise summary of the great contention of the prophets, in Samuel's word to Saul: "Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt-offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams" (1 Sam. 15:22).

Among the various early codifications of Israel's law, the book of Deuteronomy especially is pervaded by the prophetic spirit. Love is the dominant note. It is in Deuteronomy that we read that "great and first commandment" which our Lord placed in the forefront of his own teaching (Matt. 22:37-39; cf. Deut. 6:5); while in the midst of the ritual provisions of Leviticus is found a "second like unto it" (Lev. 19:18). The holiness demanded in Deuteronomy is certainly no mere formal compliance with ceremonial requirements, but a practice animated by love, generosity, and pity toward the unfortunate and suffering, and by kindness even toward animals. Hence, of course, the corresponding conception of sin was intensely ethical. Cruelty, oppression, pitilessness—these are examples of pre-eminent sins. The keynote of the book is heard in such sayings as: "God doth execute the judgment of the fatherless and widow, and loveth the stranger, in giving him food and raiment. Love ye therefore the stranger; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt" (10:18, 19); "Thou shalt not take the widow's raiment to pledge" (24:17); "No man shall take the mill or the upper millstone as surety," because it is "the man's life" (25:6); "When thou reapest and hast forgotten a sheaf, go not to fetch it; it shall be for the stranger, and for the fatherless and the widow" (24: 19). "Nowhere," says Wellhausen, "is the basal idea of prophecy more clearly expressed than in the motives of Deuteronomy—that Jehovah will have nothing for himself, but regards and

requires as piety that men do right to each other; that his will does not lie in an unknown height and distance, but in the moral sphere which is known and understood by all"<sup>1</sup> (cf. 30:11ff.; Rom. 10:6 ff.). This holy will of God requires, first of all, the exercise of plain, practical virtues, and the neglect or defiance of this requirement is the very essence of sin.

In general, however, the conception of sin in the Pentateuch wears a more legal cast. The law is conceived as the direct expression of the divine will; its neglect or infraction is therefore at once a sin and a crime. There is no distinction, in this mode of view, between transgression of the organic law of Israel and disobedience to the will of God. Hence in legalism sin is conceived to consist primarily in the infraction of statutes, especially the ceremonial regulations.

In the early prophetic period, when the representatives of Jehovah's worship were contending with rival cults, it was natural that idolatry should be pictured as the worst and most characteristic sin in Israel. This idea is the prevailing one in the book of Judges, and in 1 and 2 Kings.

Let us now review the teachings of the prophets with a view to illustrating the conceptions of sin which are presupposed in them. It is obvious that in the few pages at our command for this purpose we can take into view but a single phase of prophetic teaching, and even this only illustratively. We begin with the prophets of the eighth century—Amos, Hosea, Isaiah of Jerusalem, and Micah.

Amos continued the work of Elijah, with this difference, that whereas Elijah labored for the reformation of Israel, Amos threatened its destruction. He was a prophet of judgment, a herald of the doom which impended over a proud, luxurious, and corrupt people. God is measuring the nation with a plumb-line (Amos 7: 7, 8); a strict test and a stern retribution—these are the keynotes of this prophet's message. The work to which he felt himself called was negative and radical, rather than constructive. It was to denounce the sins of Israel and to depict their consequences. Amos was a forerunner of John the Baptist, heralding the work of the winnowing fan and the destroying ax of judgment. The basis of his message was the conviction that Jehovah's will is absolute and supreme,

<sup>1</sup> *Skizzen und Vorarbeiten*, Vol. I, p. 70.

and must crush all who oppose themselves to it. Not a future retribution, not a far-off judgment, but an immediate and overwhelming destruction impends over the sinful nation.

The righteousness which Amos advocates is chiefly what we should call equity or fairness, and the sins which he denounces are mainly sins of man against man, such as cruelty, fraud, and oppression. Amos is a champion of humanity, a defender of the rights of the poor, of the widow and the orphan; hence the sins against which he inveighs are largely sins of inhumanity. He denounces the oppressors who "store up violence and robbery in their palaces" (3:10); the traders who "make the ephah small, and the shekel great, and deal falsely with balances," who "buy the poor for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes, and sell the refuse of the wheat" (8:5, 6). His indignation burns against the proud and cruel rich men, who, living in ease and luxury, "trample upon the poor, take exactions from him of wheat" (5:11), and take away even his clothing for debt (2:8), thus "turning judgment to wormwood, and casting down righteousness to the earth" (5:7). He arraigns the corrupt and venal judges who "afflict the just, take a bribe, and turn aside the needy in the gate from their right" (5:12).

In vain does a people guilty of such offenses hope to win Jehovah's favor by sacrifices: "I hate, I despise your feasts, and I will take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Yea, though ye offer me your burnt-offerings and meal-offerings, I will not accept them; neither will I regard the peace-offerings of your fat beasts" (5:21, 22). God requires not sacrifice; he takes no delight in burnt-offerings. His one requirement is righteousness: "Let judgment roll down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream" (5:24). The one hope of the nation lies in forsaking the evil, choosing the good, and establishing and maintaining justice and equity (5:15).

There are references to idolatry and false worship (4:4, 5; 5:26), but they are comparatively incidental. Even the recognition of false gods and the shameful abuses practiced in Jehovah's sanctuaries recede into the background in comparison with the sins of inhumanity which have turned the ceremonial of Israel into a hollow mockery. We may say, then, that for Amos sin is, primarily, inhumanity or injustice. It is violation of the rights of man, and

so an offense against him who bestows and defends those rights, and who ever holds in his hand the scales of an absolute, unvarying justice.

Hosea carried forward the prophetic work of his older contemporary, Amos, but in a somewhat different spirit. We have seen that to the mind of Amos God was an inexorable Judge whose swift and sure retribution should be visited upon Israel's sins. He stands measuring the nation with the plumb-line of an absolute moral law. The relation between Israel and Jehovah is chiefly conceived as a relation of moral responsibility, involving prompt and, as it were, self-acting retribution upon all sin. Hence the message of Amos ends with the prediction of judgment.

Hosea conceives the relation of Israel to Jehovah as the religious, covenant relation. Israel is God's son whom he has chosen, delivered from bondage, and led throughout all his history (11:1). Hence his whole dealing with the nation is that of a father. The relation of Jehovah to the nation is conceived as much more personal and intimate by Hosea than by Amos. The experience of Hosea in recovering his faithless spouse was to him the human analogue of Jehovah's patient and persistent love. Jehovah is described as the faithful husband of Israel, who labors and suffers to win and keep the people's love and devotion, as the prophet had labored and suffered in the effort to win back his dissolute wife. Hence the keynote of Hosea's preaching is the divine love. Not that he judges the sins of the people less severely than Amos; he has quite as strong a sense of the burning anger of God against evil as his contemporary. But the fact that all his preaching starts from the conception of a peculiar relation of love and fellowship between Israel and Jehovah enables him to see a goal and purpose in the divine punishments which were not apparent to Amos. He sees that the love which punishes the unfaithfulness of Israel must at length awaken love, gratitude, and loyalty in return. The recovery of the people to faithfulness and devotion—that is, according to Hosea, the goal of all God's action in his dealings with the nation. This purpose of grace he persistently pursues; reward and penalty alike have this end in view; Jehovah punishes in order to save.

What, now, is the idea of sin which corresponds to these con-

ceptions of God and of his relations to men? Sin is, primarily, ingratitude, an unfilial attitude and course of action, indifference or contempt of a father's loving care; or, in another figure, the falseness of a wife to a faithful husband. The sins against which Hosea inveighed were largely the same as those described by Amos, but they are contemplated in a somewhat different light. In Amos, as we saw, sins were offenses against what we should call the moral law—infractions of the just and equitable requirements of the supreme Lawgiver; hence they are contemplated from the point of view of injustice. In Hosea, however, sins in Israel are breaches of the covenant relation, and their essence is ingratitude. In Amos sins are mainly instances of inhumanity in violation of Jehovah's just and equitable requirements; in Hosea they are illustrations of a failure to appreciate God's love and to respond to it—examples of unfaithfulness and base ingratitude.

The points which have been mentioned are illustrated by such characteristic reference to Israel's sins as the following: "Jehovah loveth the children of Israel, though they turn unto other gods" (3:1). "But they like men have transgressed the covenant; there have they dealt treacherously against me" (6:7). "I taught Ephraim to walk; I took them on my arms; but they knew not that I healed them. I drew them with the cords of a man, with bands of love. . . . How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? Mine heart is turned within me, my compassions are kindled together. I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger; I will not return to destroy Ephraim; for I am God, and not man; the Holy One in the midst of thee" (11:3, 4, 8, 9). "I will heal their back-sliding, I will love them freely; for mine anger is turned away from him" (14:4). It will be found, I think, that all the various forms of sin are regarded by Hosea as illustrating a loveless and ungrateful spirit. Trust in heathen world-powers, confidence in their own political security, dependence upon the cultus—all spring from ignorance of Jehovah, from moral blindness to his will and his love. "The Lord hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth, nor mercy [*hēsed*, 'goodness,' 'piety,' or 'devotion'], nor knowledge of God in the land" (4:1). The true good, then, consists in the knowledge of Jehovah, a loyal fellowship, a moral kinship; and what he requires,

above all things, is dutiful love, kindness, *pietas* (*hêsed*; 6:6). Hence sin is, primarily, ignorance of Jehovah, lack of insight into his nature and requirements, want of appreciation and passion for truth and righteousness, moral blindness and stupidity, a withering blight upon all high aspiration and affection, an obduracy which seals up even the springs of penitence (5:4).

Isaiah, the son of Amoz, taught in Judah the same great moral truths which Amos and Hosea had preached in the Northern Kingdom—the righteousness and retributive justice of God, the worthlessness of sacrifice where penitence and obedience are wanting, and the necessity of a morality in man corresponding to the character and requirements of Jehovah. The keynote of Isaiah's teaching is the holiness of God—his exaltation in majesty and purity above the world of limitation, weakness, and sin. In his inaugural vision the prophet saw Jehovah "sitting upon a throne high and lifted up," and heard the seraphim cry: "Holy, holy, holy is Jehovah of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory" (6:1, 3). No prophet has emphasized the sovereignty and transcendence of God more strongly than Isaiah. In glory, in power, and in purity he is infinitely exalted. "Jehovah of hosts is exalted in judgment, and God the Holy One is sanctified in righteousness" (5:16). Yet his sovereignty is not arbitrary, and his exaltation does not exclude his presence with his people.

In accordance with this emphasis upon the majesty and moral severity of Jehovah, sin appears in Isaiah chiefly in the character of pride. This note is heard in passages like the following: "The lofty looks of man shall be brought low, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and Jehovah alone shall be exalted in that day. For there shall be a day of Jehovah of hosts upon all that is proud and haughty, and upon all that is lifted up, and it shall be brought low" (2:11, 12). When he received his prophetic call, it was the awful majesty of God, and the contrast with it of his own and his people's weakness and sin, that overwhelmed Isaiah: "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, Jehovah of hosts" (6:5). God is the potter who fashions the clay as he will (29:16); in his hand are all men and



nations; their part is to be submissive and humble: "I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his high looks" (10:12).

But while sin is thus presented in this somewhat different aspect from that which it wears in Amos and Hosea, the same concrete faults are described by Isaiah as by his predecessors. Idolatry (2:20), false confidence in the efficacy of sacrifice, and injustice as between man and man, were forms of sin as rife in Judah as they had been in Israel. "Bring no more vain oblations," cries Isaiah; "incense is an abomination" (1:13). "Woe unto them that turn aside the needy from judgment, and take away the right of the poor of my people, that widows may be their spoil, and that they may make the fatherless their prey" (10:2). "Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow" (1:16, 17). Words like these show that Isaiah had as keen a sense of the inhumanity of sin as had Amos. That he also saw sin as base ingratitude, a cruel return for all Jehovah's love (as Hosea had done) is evident from many of his appeals. God's requirements are not the mere dictates of an arbitrary sovereign, but the reasonable demands of a Father and Friend. "Come now and let us reason together," saith Jehovah, in an effort to persuade his people to become "willing and obedient" (1:18, 19). God is "wonderful in counsel and excellent in wisdom" (28:29), as well as awe-inspiring; therefore let them also that "err in spirit come to understanding, and them that murmur learn doctrine" (29:23, 24). It is evident, therefore, that the holiness of God in Isaiah is not a mere punitive energy, adapted solely to inspire awe and terror, but includes also an inherent reasonableness and a winsome goodness by which he appeals to men. While, therefore, sin is pride, a false self-exaltation, it is also unreason, an unfilial affront to a Father's love: "I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me" (1:2). The sinfulness of the nation is seen in the contempt of God's care and goodness, in the fact that they do "not consider" his mercies, but rather "despise the Holy One of Israel" (1:3, 4; 5:24). While it is true that, according to Isaiah, Jehovah vindicates his holiness in the punishment

of sin (6:9-12; 5:16), it is equally true that he expresses and magnifies it in seeking to win men to faith and obedience, that is, to a life of moral purity like his own. God's holiness is something more than a mere retributive impulse. "His purity and his righteousness, his faithfulness and his truth, his mercy and his loving-kindness, nay even his jealousy and his wrath, his zeal and his indignation—these are the different rays which combine to make up the perfect light of holiness."<sup>2</sup>

In the earlier prophecies of Micah the spirit of Amos lives again. He proclaims the stern judgment of Jehovah upon Samaria and Judah for their sins, such as the idolatry and corruption of the people, and the cruelty and rapacity of the rich and ruling classes. The evils which he depicts are chiefly social (cf. Amos). Divination, witchcraft, and soothsaying are condemned, and the destruction of graven images and all other material objects of worship threatened (1:7; 3:7; 5:12-14); but references to idolatry and sorcery are comparatively incidental. The two forms of sin which most excite the indignation of Micah are (1) the presumption of a people's trust in Jehovah while they defy him by wilful and persistent sinning, and (2) the oppression of the poor peasantry by the rich nobles. The people like to listen to those false prophets who assure them of ease and luxury (2:11). Such religious leaders inspire a false confidence in God. The priests "teach for hire" and the prophets "divine for money;" they induce men to "lean upon the Lord and to say: Is not the Lord in the midst of us? no evil shall come upon us" (3:11, 12). To all this presumption Micah's answer is: "Zion shall for your sake be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of a forest" (3:12).

But it is the rapacity of the ruling classes which most deeply stirs the prophet's indignation. "They covet fields and seize them, and houses and take them away; and they oppress a man and his house, even a man and his heritage" (2:2). They have lost all sense of justice; "they hate the good, and love the evil." They flay the poor and chop them to pieces, as if preparing them to be devoured (3:2). The temple and the state are maintained with the rewards of iniquity. "They build up Zion with blood, and Jerusalem with

<sup>2</sup> A. F. Kirkpatrick, *The Doctrine of the Prophets*, p. 177.

iniquity" (3:10). "Scant measure," "wicked balances," "deceitful weights"—such are the means by which the prosperous have enriched themselves at the expense of the poor (6:10-12). For all this the prophet threatens them with the fires of swift and certain judgment. They shall be driven into exile and their land left desolate: "Up and begone! for this is not your rest; because of uncleanness shall ye be destroyed, even with grievous destruction" (2:10).

The later prophecies are conceived more in the spirit of Hosea, and "speak comfortably to Jerusalem" of restoration and healing. Thus the stern denunciations of the people's sins are offset with pleasant promises and happy prospects. God shall yet send forth his law from Zion and his word from Jerusalem in a blessed coming time of peace and piety. It is this Judean Amos, this indignant representative of the oppressed poor, this scathing critic of his people's sins, who can also picture such ideals of obedience, faith, and forgiveness (believing, too, in their realization) as are expressed in the words: "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth Jehovah require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (6:8). "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger forever, because he delighteth in mercy. He will turn again and have compassion upon us; he will tread our iniquities under foot; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea" (7:18, 19).

Such are the principal notes in the teaching of the earlier prophets concerning sin.

It will suffice our present purpose to review briefly, in addition, the teaching of the three great prophets of the period of the Chaldean domination and the exile—Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Deutero-Isaiah.

In order to illustrate Jeremiah's conception of sin, it is necessary to refer to his ideas of God and righteousness. Jehovah is Israel's hope and Savior, who abides in the midst of his people (7:8, 9); he is the Fountain of living and healing waters (17:13, 14), the Father (3:19), and "the Lord who exercises loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth" (9:24). But this gracious God is searching and exacting in his moral requirements. He "searches

the heart and tries the reins, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings" (17:10). He "tries the righteous;" he "sees the reins and the heart" (20:12). None can hide himself in secret places where God shall not see him (23:24). Now the true righteousness is an attitude on man's part corresponding to this character and disposition of God. Religion is a knowledge of God, a fellowship with him in the exercise of that loving-kindness and righteousness in which he delights (9:24); it is joy in God and all that is godlike: "Thy words were unto me a joy and the rejoicing of my heart" (15:16); it is a steadfast hope and loyal trust in God (17:7), and an actual, practical obedience to his will. His word is: "Amend your ways and your doings" (7:3). It is the heart which must be circumcised (4:4); "wash thy heart from wickedness" (4:14). It is vain to trust in sacred rites or traditions. It is useless to cry "The temple, the temple," unless men do justice and cease from oppression and robbery (7:4ff.); it is vain to appeal to the law while prophet and priest are given over to covetousness and deceit (8:8-10). An inward reformation, a moral righteousness alone, avails with God.

The principal corresponding ideas concerning sin which Jeremiah develops are as follows:

1. Sin is an unnatural, unfilial attitude to God. It is called a backsliding, a wandering (14:7, 10), a forsaking of God (17:13). The birds know the time for their migrations, but sinful men no longer obey the divine instinct within them (8:7). Perhaps the phrase which best defines the nature of sin is "the stubbornness of an evil heart" (7:24); sin is an inner perversion, an abnormal attitude toward the gracious and holy God. The prophet recognizes the law and power of habit—the deep depravity which results from the repetition of sinful acts and choices. Sinners "slide back by perpetual backsliding. They hold fast deceit; they refuse to return. I hearkened and heard, but they spake not aright; no man repenteth him of his wickedness saying, What have I done? Everyone turneth to his course, as a horse that rusheth headlong in the battle" (8:5, 6). He likens sinful habit to physical characteristics which cannot be changed: "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed

to do evil" (13:23). "The heart is deceitful above all things, and it is desperately sick; who can know it?" (17:9). The devotees of sin feel the hopelessness of their case and say: "We will walk after our own devices, and we will do everyone after the stubbornness of his evil heart" (18:12). In this connection, however, two points are to be noted. First, that this obduracy and hopelessness are not conceived to be absolute, since, as we have seen, the prophet summons the sinful people to amend their ways and wash their hearts, and assumes in so doing, that they have not utterly lost the capacity for right choice and action, though, of course, this power must be quickened by the divine aid, since, "it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (11:23). The second point to be observed is that the prophet never refers this depravity or sinful character to the *nature* of man as such. Men are not represented as inheriting it, but as acquiring it by their own action and habit. The sinfulness of men is always represented as the consequence of their own personal sinning. Their own wickedness reproves them (2:19). Israel was planted a "noble vine," and by her own sins has become a "degenerate plant" (2:21). There is no reference to Adam, the fall, imputation, or native depravity.

2. Sin is universal. In vain would Jerusalem be searched for anyone who does justice and seeks truth (5:1). "Everyone turneth to his course, as a horse that rusheth headlong in the battle" (8:6); "everyone from the least even unto the greatest is given unto covetousness" (8:10). While, therefore, Jeremiah makes no sweeping statements about mankind in general, much less teaches any doctrine concerning human "nature," it is evident that he regarded the men of the world which he knew as sinners, one and all.

3. Finally, this sin is at once national or corporate and individual. The prophet contemplates the people as a unit and appeals to the nation as a whole: "Jerusalem, wash thy heart from wickedness" (4:14); "for my people is foolish" (4:22). At the same time, we hear the note of personal guilt and responsibility. The fact that for our prophet "man is the heart of man" (Davidson) gives a personal and inward character alike to righteousness and to sin. Notably in chap. 31 does Jeremiah's individualism appear. Men shall no more say: "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge. But everyone shall die for his own iniquity;

every man that eateth the sour grapes, his teeth shall be set on edge" (31:29, 30). The individual may not explain his sin by reference to his membership in a sinful nation, or palliate it by appeal to the sins of his ancestors. Each man is responsible for his own acts and character. In like manner, salvation from sin must be a personal and moral affair. While it is with "the house of Israel" and with "the house of Judah"—that is, with the nation—that Jehovah will make the new covenant, he will realize this covenant relation by putting his law in the inward parts of individual men and by writing it on their hearts, by causing every man to know the Lord, and by forgiving and no more remembering their sin (31:31-34).

It is natural that Ezekiel, being a priest, should describe sin in terms of the ritual. It is depicted as uncleanness, defilement, profanation (e. g., 36:17ff.). Hence salvation is described as a cleansing: "I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean; from all your filthiness and from your idols will I cleanse you" (36:25). But this uncleanness is not a mere ceremonial defilement. It is, no less, a moral corruption which requires for its removal the gift of a new heart and the bestowment of a new spirit (5:26).

The most notable contribution of Ezekiel to the doctrine of sin is found in his insistence upon the direct, personal responsibility of every man before God. There was a proverb in Israel: "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge;" that is, the children are held responsible and are punished for the sins of their ancestors. Such a conception was not unnatural in view of that sense of solidarity—the idea of national sinfulness and national salvation—which prevailed in Israel, and it may have been an inference from the words of the second commandment ("visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children, upon the third and upon the fourth generation," Exod. 20:5). Jeremiah predicts, as we have seen, that in the days of the new covenant men shall no more believe this proverb, but shall charge every man with full and sole responsibility for his own sin: "Every man shall die for his own iniquity; every man that eateth sour grapes, his teeth shall be set on edge" (Jer. 31:29).

Ezekiel quotes and explicitly rejects the saying in question: "As I live, saith the Lord, ye shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel" (18:2, 3). He then unfolds the contrary doctrine.

All souls, that of father and son alike, belong to God, and "the soul that sinneth, *it* shall die" (5:4); the innocent shall not die for another's sin; the guilty alone shall die on account of his own. He elaborates this thought at length. If, he continues, a man has lived a just and upright life, he shall live in consequence of it (vss. 5-9). If now he have a son who is wicked, the penalty of this son's wickedness shall fall upon himself alone (vss. 10-13). If, again, this wicked man beget a son who leads a virtuous life, "he shall not die for the iniquity of his father, he shall surely live" (vss. 14-17). The prophet scouts the saying which the people keep repeating: "Wherefore doth not the son bear the iniquity of the father?" (vs. 19). He does not argue against the maxim; he simply asserts the contrary, apparently assuming that the notion that guilt could be transferred from ancestor to descendant required no refutation: "The soul that sinneth," he repeats, "it shall die; the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son; the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him" (vs. 20). Thus does Ezekiel absolutely repudiate the current popular doctrine of hereditary sin.

In the most emphatic manner does this prophet also proclaim a full and free forgiveness for sin upon repentance and amendment of life. Jehovah has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that he turn from his wickedness and live (18:23, 32). His sinful past shall not be counted against him: "When the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive (vs. 27). The law of retribution, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die," is not unconditional. If the sin is repented of and forsaken, the threatened penalty shall not ensue: "When I say unto the wicked 'Thou shalt surely die,' if he turn from his sin, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die. None of his sins that he hath committed shall be remembered against him; he shall surely live" (33:14-16). Ezekiel was, above all others, the prophet of personal responsibility and of pardon on condition of penitence. His whole vindication of God is based upon the idea that every man's sin is his own, and that he alone will be held responsible for it. Neither the goodness nor the wickedness of any man

can be imparted or imputed to any other. If none could be saved by the righteousness of a Noah, a Daniel, or a Job (14:14), it is quite certain that, according to the principles of this prophet, no man could be condemned for the sin of any ancestor, immediate or remote.

We note, in conclusion, the conception of the Exilic Isaiah. By no prophet is the idea of sin more closely correlated with the idea of God. Jehovah's action and character, as conceived by Deutero-Isaiah, are best represented by four terms—his glory, his name, his holiness, and his righteousness. Jehovah does all things for his own glory. The creation and salvation of Israel, and the execution of punishment for sin, illustrate and reflect his glory—the radiant splendor of his character and purposes (40:5; 43:7; 59:19; 66:18, 19). An analogous representation is that Jehovah acts with regard for his name or his honor. He forgives the sins of his people for his own sake (43:25), or his name's sake: "I will defer mine anger for my name's sake, and for my praise will I refrain from thee, that I cut thee not off. For mine own sake, for mine own sake, will I do it; for how should my name be profaned? and my glory will I not give to another" (48:9, 11). But what is the content of Jehovah's "glory"? What is he moved to do by consideration for his "name"? These are terms for the nature or character of Jehovah, but the question remains: What, in concrete fact, does that character include?

We find the answer to this question partly in the connections in which the terms mentioned occur, and partly in the use of two other terms, the holiness and the righteousness of Jehovah. "The Holy One of Israel" is Second Isaiah's favorite designation of God. And what is it that God as the Holy One of Israel does? It is to redeem his people. Over and over again the term in question is used as substantially synonymous with Redeemer (41:14; 43:14; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7; 54:5). Israel's Holy One is Israel's Savior. The "glory" of God is his saving purpose of grace. The prophet's idea of Jehovah's glory is well represented by that passage in the prophetic document in which we read: "And Moses said: 'Show me, I pray thee, thy glory.' And Jehovah said: 'I will make all my *goodness* pass before thee, and I will be *gracious* to whom I will be gracious,'" etc. (Exod. 33:18, 19). The "name" of God is a desig-



nation of those qualities which led him to enter into a covenant of love with Israel, and which guarantee his faithfulness to his promises.

More definite still, if possible, is the answer supplied to our question by this prophet's conception of Jehovah's righteousness. Note his characteristic phraseology: "Let the skies pour down righteousness: that they may bring forth salvation" (45:8); "bring near my righteousness, my salvation shall not tarry" (46:13); "My righteousness shall be forever, and my salvation unto all generations" (51:8); "I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save" (63:1). Jehovah is a righteous God, and (therefore) a Savior (45:21). For this prophetic righteousness is almost a synonym for salvation. The gracious providence of God, and especially his purpose to deliver, bless, and prosper Israel, are deduced from the righteousness of God. So far is righteousness from standing in any contrast with mercy that it is inseparable from it and almost synonymous with it. The righteousness of God is chiefly manifested in showing mercy. "Salvation is the correlative and companion of righteousness."<sup>3</sup>

Now, it is in the light of these ideas that our author's prevailing conception of sin appears. Sin is blindness, deafness, indifference, obstinacy. It is a failure to appreciate and respond to the saving righteousness of Jehovah. This is his complaint against sinful Israel: "Thou art obstinate, and thy neck is an iron sinew; thou heardest not, thou knewest not, thine ear was not opened" (48:4, 8). Idolatry is viewed as an illustration of ingratitude and unnatural repudiation of a Father's love and honor, and Jehovah's appeal to the people to repent and return to him in loyalty and love is constantly reinforced by references to his past goodness and to a present, waiting forgiveness. In spite of all this, the people persist in their sins. Apart from idolatry, Deutero-Isaiah does not describe specific forms of sin with so much definiteness as most of his predecessors. But, perhaps, the principle of sin is made, on this account, all the more evident. Sin is hardness of heart, irresponsiveness to God's goodness, disregard of his providence, indifference to his salvation.

From this summary of the teaching of the prophets it will be evident that these great preachers of righteousness dealt practically with sin as it appears in human experience. They say nothing

<sup>3</sup> Kirkpatrick, *The Doctrine of the Prophets*, p. 382.

of its origin and advance no theory of its propagation. They make no reference to Adam, and betray no trace of the idea that the sinfulness of mankind was to be explained by a primeval fall. In short, they do not concern themselves with the so-called "problems" of sin, but regard and treat it as a character which men have acquired by their own choices and actions, and for the possession of which they are personally responsible.

Can we now gather up into some general statement the gist of the prophetic teaching concerning sin? Is there some one word which would include its various meanings and manifestations? Are the inhumanity described by Amos and Micah, the ingratitude depicted by Hosea and Second Isaiah, and the pride, stubbornness, and defilement denounced respectively by Isaiah of Jerusalem, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel—are all these forms of sin illustrations of one single principle? May we not say that they are all examples of selfishness, that is, of a false self-assertion—a self-will, self-righteousness, and self-glorification as over against the good and holy and acceptable will of God. All alike are breaches of the beneficent moral order; all are infractions of the golden rule which enjoins upon man a course of action, and a corresponding disposition, which might well be universal. Sin is the false and futile effort to realize one's true good in independence of God and of his changeless, reasonable, and beneficent will.